

The Fat of the Land

By

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I was sitting in the Hotel Sula's air-conditioned bar watching through the glass wall the world walk by outside in the tropical heat. Another land deal had fallen through. I was feeling the sickening awareness of poverty creeping up from behind. Salva Vida, the only beer I can drink in large quantities, was helping to dull my awareness of my impending shortage of financial funds. The icy cold liquid was sliding down the back of my throat when a silver Blue Bird bus pulled up and blocked my view of the park across the main boulevard that fronts the Sula.

Old school buses are a common site in Honduras. They are the mass transit system of the country. "Kansas City Public Schools" and other such labels are often left on the sides of the dilapidated buses as they haul a hundred plus passengers packed like the proverbial sardine can around the country. Not all are old and dilapidated though. This silver Blue Bird blocking my view appeared to be in excellent shape. *Mini Mobile Community of the Future* was written in English along its side.

As I was admiring the well-kept bus, its front door folded open and out poured fifteen or so very small people. I wouldn't call them midgets or dwarfs. They were small, well-proportioned people. The tallest of them was about four and a half, maybe five feet tall.

"Cuidado. Un bus de enanos," someone in the bar said. "Be careful. A bus of midgets." Someone else in the dark recesses of the bar laughed briefly.

I watched these small people amass on the sidewalk in front of the hotel. They were clean and intelligent looking – just atypically small. They were of a variety of ethnicities. Shades from black to rosy pink were present. There were males and females, but as far as I could tell, no children. One of the smallest of the small people, a man with a beard, commanded the attention of the group. He spoke to them and, as soon as he finished, several of the small people entered the Hotel Sula. A couple of them set about inspecting the wheels and undercarriage of the bus, while others re-entered the vehicle.

I took another sip from my Salva Vida and enjoyed its journey to my stomach. One of the small people entered the bar, and struggled his way up into a stool. He then asked Jose, the bartender, in English, "Do you have any fat?" Jose just arched his eyebrows and continued stacking glasses. The small man realized the bartender didn't - or wouldn't – speak English. He then pulled a pocket-sized English/Spanish dictionary out of his pants pocket.

I left my seat, crossed the room and leaned up against the bar next to the diminutive guest. "El es pidiendo si usted tiene grasa," I said to Jose.

Somewhat bewildered, Jose responded, "No, esa es una bar. No hay grasa aquí."

“Nope, no fat here,” I said to the little man.

“Thank you,” he smiled. “I’m having a hard time with this Spanish.”

“So, you are with the *Mini Mobile Community of the Future?*” I asked and motioned toward the window.

“Yes, I am,” he responded proudly. He stuck out a tiny hand. I shook it gently fearing I might crunch his delicate bones. He firmly shook back. “My name is Douglas Jones from Lexington, Kentucky.”

“Nice to meet you Douglas. I’m Frank.”

“Are you on vacation here?” he asked.

“No, I live here. Would you like a beer?”

“Well...” He looked out at the bus and then in at the lounge where the small bearded leader was talking to the hotel manager. “Sure, why not?” He smiled again. “It sure is hot out there. A beer would be good.”

I held up two fingers to Jose as I finished off my beer. “So what do you need fat for?”

“It’s to make biodiesel. Our bus runs on biodiesel. We have traveled over fifteen hundred miles on this tour - completely on biodiesel.”

“That’s quite impressive,” I responded. “What the hell is biodiesel?”

“Biodiesel is diesel fuel produced from biological origins as opposed to petroleum based diesel fuel which comes from...”

“Petroleum?”

“Right.” Douglas seemed pleased that I was paying attention. “We have been stopping at restaurants collecting used cooking grease and fat to distill into fuel for the bus. We have also used road kill found along the highways and even fat from liposuction clinics in Mexico.”

“Road kill? Liposuction?” Now my eyebrows were arched.

“Sure. Did you ever see the movie *Fight Club*? You know the part where they steal the human fat from the lipo clinic and then make soap from it?”

“No,” I said.

“Well... anyway, when you make biodiesel, one of the byproducts is soap.”

“Is that why the bus is so shinny?”

Douglas laughed. “Yea, I guess so!” He laughed some more. He took a teaspoon sized draw from his beer and then paused breathing deeply. “You can get oil from any living organism. If you collect enough oil you can run a diesel engine with it.”

“So you might say that you are living off the *fat* of the land?” I asked.

“Ha! I guess you could say that. You know, we are giving a demonstration tomorrow out at the ... what’s it called? The campo something or other.”

“Campo Agus.”

“That’s right. Tomorrow at three we’ll demonstrate how to make biodiesel.”

“I’ll be gone tomorrow.”

“Well, Friday we will be in Siguatepeque for another demonstration... and then Sunday we will be in Tegucigalpa.”

“So that is the future society: driving around in a bus powered by fat?”

“That’s just part of it.” Douglas took another undersized draw from his beer. “Reducing is another part.”

I noticed the petite bearded commander guy in the lobby shaking hands with the hotel manager. He then gestured to some of his small followers. They exited out the front of the hotel and made their way to the service entrance.

“Reduction,” continued Douglas, “not just in number, but in size also.”

“Yeah?” I muttered and directed my beer numbed attention back to my companion.

“I’m talking about the human population. It has to be reduced both in number and in size or else humanity will be a cancer that depletes the earth of all life sustaining resources and kills all life forms on Earth. There are already more than six billion humans on the earth. Experts claim that the Earth can only indefinitely sustain about one billion. Some say even less. A lot of it depends on consumption. You know - life style and technology, but almost all of the experts concur that we have crossed the limit.”

“Interesting,” I said genuinely impressed at this turn in the conversation. “Hence the small people.”

“Exactly. Small people take up less space and use fewer resources. And in our technologically advanced world, being big and strong is no longer an evolutionary advantage. In fact it is a disadvantage.”

“I guess you could be right about that,” I said suddenly feeling very aware of my two hundred and forty-some pounds.

“Members of *The Mini Mobile Community of the Future* are selected on intelligence, racial diversity, temperance, and size as you probably have noticed.”

“Amazing. I guess I wouldn’t make it in your community.”

“Sorry, you are a little big,” Douglas chuckled.

“I’m a dinosaur,” I said and took a long draw on my Salva Vida. For some reason at that point I thought of my kids. How long ago and far away that life all seemed. The beers were taking hold of my brain.

I think Douglas sensed my drifting. He waved a tiny hand in front of my face and, once he had regained my attention, continued. “A Toyota Yaris is a veritable limousine for someone of my size. A small Pizza Hut pizza is enough to feed a family of four small people. More floors can be put in sky scrapers, more people in a plane, and more of us fit in a bus.”

“One beer is like a six pack to you...and when you die you don’t take up as much space in the ground or use as much gas to cremate.” I felt bad about saying that, but Douglas just laughed it off.

“That’s right,” he chuckled. “Would you like to come and see the inside of our bus? It is an amazing piece of machinery.”

I looked out the window and saw the hotel manager leading some of the cooks from the hotel’s restaurant out of the service entrance to the back of the bus. The cooks were carrying large pots. Curiosity got the better of me. “Sure, why not.” I said and slapped a wad of Lempiras down on the bar. “Let’s have a look.”

As I stood up, I again became very conscious – almost embarrassed – about my size and weight. At six foot two I felt like a giant next to Douglas.

The bus was impressive. The interior was meticulously designed and constructed. It was scaled to the small person, of course. There were at least three bathroom/shower units, a library with scaled down books and a booth with several laptop computers. Sleeping quarters were a series of fold down shelves with bedding. Toward the rear of the bus there was a dinning area with a kitchen.

“So, who paid for all of this? The US government?” I asked.

“*The Mini Mobile Community of the Future* was started by Carle McAllen about three years ago. Carle came up with the idea, started a blog describing his ideal society of the future. People – especially small ones - took notice.”

As we were going through the bus, Douglas introduced me to various residents. There was Hilda from Canada, Bob from New York, Tyrone from Indiana, Juan from Texas... They all were polite and seemed pleased to meet me.

Douglas informed me that as the community made their on-going tour through the Americas they were actively recruiting more members for more *Mini Mobile Communities*. It was a never-ending, information dissemination and recruiting tour. They already had a total of ten buses cruising around different parts of the world. Their bus was nearing the *mitosis stage* as he called it. They were about to obtain another bus and split the group. He happily described *The Mini Mobile Communities* as living organisms, growing, reacting, consuming, and multiplying.

We then entered the very back of the bus. This area had the biodiesel refining equipment. It smelled like French fries. A couple of Mini Mobile community members were using hand pumps to pump fat from the pots the cooks had brought into two large storage tanks. Douglas carefully explained to me that the fat and grease had to be heated to remove water and then filtered. It is then treated with alcohol and lye. The resulting biodiesel burns cleaner and more powerfully than petroleum diesel.

Right after the speech, the cooks left and the doors shut. I began to turn and...wham!

I woke up wedged between a huge, sobbing, fat woman and a glum, obese teenage boy. We were in a small cell with one tiny thick glass window. Our feet were bound with rope as were our hands behind our backs. We were all stripped of our clothing. I could tell we were traveling along the main mountainous highway of Honduras. The bus was swerving to avoid the potholes and occasionally hitting one. My head throbbed.

The blubbering woman was obviously in no shape to discuss our situation. So I addressed the boy.

“What the hell is going on here?”

“The pygmies are going to eat us,” he replied. His mouth began to quiver.

I didn’t want him to lose control, as the fat lady already had. I needed information. I needed sense. “Don’t worry,” I said. “The fat lady hasn’t sung just yet.” That didn’t seem to help. He just looked at me as if I were crazy. His mouth began to get all screwed up and his eyes shut. “What’s your name, kid?” I asked in desperation.

He took a deep breath and let it out in a loud quavering sigh. "Enrique," he replied. He was regaining his composure.

"You speak good English. You go to the international school?"

"No. I learned it from watching TV."

Figures, I thought. The boy weighed at least two hundred pounds. He had probably spent more hours watching TV in his short life than I had in my entire 43 years. "How old are you?"

"Thirteen and a half. I'll be fourteen in December."

"Yeah? My daughter will be fifteen in December!"

Enrique looked up at me. "Can you get us out of here, mister?"

I looked around at the sturdily built cell, at the naked, fat, hysterical lady, and back at the kid. "Sure. Don't worry." Then I asked, "Why do you think they're going to eat us?"

"The pygmies ate Carlos, my friend. We were ordering banana split specials at the Kobs Ice Cream store when their bus pulled up. They told us we had won a trip to a candy factory where they use little people to make the candy – you know, like Willy Wonka. So we got in the bus and then they tied us up. They chopped Carlos into pieces and boiled his parts in a big pot. I saw through the window. They served him with *alote*... corn, and rice and beans and tortillas." Enrique stopped and started to cry. "I'm hungry. I haven't eaten in hours."

The breaks squealed, the three of us rolled forward and bus jolted sharply as it hit a pothole. The engine roared and we sped back up to cruising speed again.

It all began to make sense to me. *Reduction - not just in number but size too*, Douglas had said. Biodiesel can be made from any living organism – including humans. These mini-cannibals were trying to save the earth by using their larger brethren not only for fuel, but as a source of nutrition too.

The bus swerved and the three of us rolled to the right. Then the bus leveled out and we repositioned ourselves.

"And the lady?" I asked.

"I don't know? They tossed her in here yesterday. She's been crying the whole time."

I couldn't help but think that if they ate their victims in the order they captured them, I could probably expect to live for a few weeks. The quantity of flesh on my two cellmates

was quite impressive. I began to wonder how many miles the bus could travel on the biodiesel distilled out of one of us.

“Okay, Enrique. I’ve got a plan. First we have to get untied.”

“How are we going to do that?” he asked.

I got up on my knees leaned forward and lifted my bound wrists as high as I could toward Enrique’s face.

“What are you doing, mister?” he asked.

“Bite the ropes!” I yelled. “Pretend you’re eating a Kobs banana split special!”

Enrique leaned forward. Just then the bus hit another pothole. He fell forward onto my back. I then fell onto the fat lady who in turn fell forward with a loud bang into the cell wall. For the first time in my stay in the cell, the fat lady was silent. We slipped around in our sweat as we struggled to reposition ourselves. Enrique leaned forward again and started chewing on the ropes that bound my wrists. In a few minutes my hands were free. Shortly after that the three of us had our hands and feet free of the ropes. The fat woman was rubbing her head and looking around with a bewildered expression.

“Where am I?” she asked. “Who are you? WHY AM I NAKED?”

“Now what?” Enrique asked stupidly.

“We get out of here,” I said firmly. I really wasn’t sure myself exactly *how* we would get out though.

Just then the door of the cell burst open. There stood Douglas and four other diminutive captors. They had on rubber gloves and were holding rods that were about two feet long. “Get back!” barked Douglas in a high-pitched yet commanding voice. “Don’t make me use this.” He wagged the rod in front of him like it was a light saber. “You can cooperate and make your last moments peaceful... or they can be quite painful. I prefer the former scenario – for everybody’s sake.”

“You are sadly mistaken if you think I’m going to sit here quietly waiting to be turned into pygmy-chow, biodiesel and soap,” I replied as I lunged. Douglas deftly jabbed the rod at me. It grazed my left side and sent a paralyzing shock through me. I collapsed quivering to the floor of the cell. Enrique lunged and fell directly on two of the little cannibals. I remember hearing the crunch of frail bones and the screaming of the teenager as he too apparently felt the shock of the cattle prongs.

Then, something spectacular happened: the Fat Lady really did sing. She let out a Wagoneresque holler and bulldozed her way past our captors and out of the door. The pygmies in a panic followed her waving their cattle prongs in the air. Enrique and I were

left alone with the two crushed pygmies. I regained control of my body and carefully rolled Enrique off of the pair of flattened yet still quivering little people. I took the cattle prong from one of them and told Enrique to take the other prong. We then made our way out of the cell and into the main corridor down the center of the bus.

There were crunched and crumbled little people littered about the interior of the bus. Up ahead the Fat Lady was still charging toward the front of the bus singing an aria at the top of her massive lungs. A few brave midgets had jumped onto the naked mass of raging humanity. They were of little consequence to the waves of cellulite on her hips and thighs that undulated up and down back and forth destroying everything in her path. The cattle prong waving captors followed her closely.

Enrique and I charged up to her little pursuers and began to jab and slash at them from behind with our prongs. I guess those cattle prongs have just too much voltage for their tiny bodies. When I laid the prong across the back of Douglass's neck there was a loud sizzling and then a crackling sound. His head popped off and like a smoking, junior-sized soccer ball rolled between my feet toward the back of the bus.

It was around this time that the Fat Lady hit the front window. I can only imagine what that must have looked like to oncoming traffic – an immensely fat, naked lady with a dozen pygmies dangling from outspread flabby arms hitting the window like an insect hitting a car's windshield - but from the inside. Glass shattered and her singing stopped. The pane of shattered safety glass held for a moment but then slowly fell outward. She and her adorning midgets disappeared out the front of the speeding bus. There was a sickening squishing sound, and the bus lifted up and tipped to the left.

The bus then crashed down on its left side. More glass shattered, metal ripped and sparks flew. Inside the bus the little people and their belongings flew helter-skelter through the air. Enrique and I quickly righted ourselves in this twisted and sliding vehicle. Through shattered windows I could see oncoming cars swerving out of our path as we slid along the pavement. Through the gapping orifice at the front of the bus I could see we were in the area south of Siguatepeque where the main highway of the country twists along precipices through the mountains on its way to Tegucigalpa. A Subaru and its unlucky inhabitants were flattened like a tin can as we slid closer and closer to the guardrail. “To the back of the bus!” I yelled to Enrique.

The precious grease had spilled and been splattered about. Everything was sliding around in it. We stepped on and over the screaming and crying members of the *Mini Mobile Community of the Future*. As we were scrambling past the cell from which we had just escaped, Enrique, who was in front of me, stopped. The little bearded leader was blocking our path. He had a sawed off shotgun leveled at us. “Get back in the cell!” he yelled.

“The gigs up, Shorty,” I replied. “Your little fantasy of a world populated by pygmies is coming to a truncated end.”

"Maybe so, Fatso, but I'll take a couple more of you pigs out before it ends." He took aim right at my big bare belly.

The bus then lurched as it hit the guardrail. The railing broke and the bus continued to slide on its side until finally coming to rest with half the bus hanging out over the edge of a gorge. In all the jostling of the bus the little leader fell forward. The barrel of the shotgun rammed downward into the metal of the bus's side. The gun acted like a pole vault and lifted the little man up into the air. For a moment the midget was pivoting on the shotgun. Then the gun discharged launching the little man up into the right side of the bus which now served as the roof. The impact knocked the little chief unconscious. The discharge of the gun also ignited some of the fat and oil that had splattered over everything. Flames began to lick about the twisted interior of the bus. Enrique and I plowed on past the stunned leader as the bus began to tip forward into the green abyss.

More fat oozed out of the distilling area at the rear of the bus. Black smoke began to fill the hull of the crippled bus. Flaming blobs of fat flowed gently toward the front end of the bus. I knew that in a matter of seconds the balance would shift; the bus would go down into the canyon below.

Enrique and I slipped and struggled over and through the mess that was interior of the bus on our way to the rear of the bus. As we progressed, the combined mass of our large bodies threw the balance of the bus in our favor. The rear of the bus came to rest gently on the roadbed. Finally we came to the emergency door at the back of the bus. I threw the release lever up and over. The door clanged on the pavement as I kicked it open.

Just as I was about to step out of the bus a voice squealed behind me. "God damn it! You oversized piece of blubber!" I turned and saw it was the little leader again. His face was smeared with soot and his beard was smoldering with the slowly burning grease. "We don't need you!" he yelled. "You are a cancer to this world!"

Enrique had stepped out of the bus and ran off naked past the bloody mass that had been the Fat Lady into the crowd of gawking motorists who had accumulated at the site. I realized I was the ballast that was keeping the bus from diving off the edge of the mountain into the green abyss below. "You don't need me?" I asked.

"Hell no!" the diminutive cannibal screamed. "Your kind has destroyed the world!" He was making his way closer to the exit and me. "We need to get rid of you and all of your kind!"

"Okay then," I said and stepped off of the emergency door. "Enjoy the future without me," I said as the back of the bus began to rise up into the air.

I will never forget the look of horror on that little tyrant's face as he realized he really did need me. I heard him scream. I heard a lot of screams coming out of that silver Blue Bird bus as it tipped and then slid off into oblivion. There was a trail of black smoke, a quiet moment and then crash. Then again silence.

Someone gave Enrique and me a couple of large blankets to cover up with. The police listened to our stories, but they didn't believe it. A brief police report was filed somewhere and promptly forgotten.

The two of us were given rides home. Back in San Pedro, two immense and happy parents greeted Enrique. I caught a taxi and returned to my empty apartment.

The wreck made the papers, but it was just another bus accident. There was no mention of the cannibalistic, biodiesel-making, squeaky clean pygmies. There was no mention of Enrique, the fat lady or me. There was no mention of the nine other buses cruising around the highways of the world.

So now I sit here typing this into my computer trying to spread the word to people like you. I'm not surprised if you don't believe any of this. I doubt if I would if I hadn't experienced it first hand. All I can say is be careful what bus you get into, be leary of tiny people... and biodiesel does seem to be a viable fuel for the future.